

## Wilson Opening Statement for Committee Markup of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011

UPDATE: Wilson's TRICARE AMENDMENT JUST APPROVED IN COMMITTEE MARKUP

Washington, D.C.-U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.), the top Republican on the Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel, released the following prepared remarks for the committee's markup of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011:

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"Chairman Skelton, Ranking Member McKeon, thank you for the opportunity to share my remarks on the National Defense Authorization for Fiscal Year 2011. This year's markup process has been very open and transparent, and I thank the leadership of both sides for making it such. One thing we all can agree on is that our fighting men and women, today's heroes, deserve our utmost respect, and we owe it to them to ensure they are properly cared for.

"As ranking member of the Military Personnel Sub-committee, there are a few issues I would like to highlight with regards to today's mark-up.

"The Military Personnel Subcommittee mark-up included a 1.9 percent basic pay raise for the military, as proposed in my bill, H.R. 4427. Also, I am also grateful the committee was able to find mandatory spending offsets to allow the

subcommittee mark to include provisions to address reserve component disability retirement issues; to allow for some early reserve retirees to be eligible for TRICARE; and to permit wounded and injured members retained on active duty to earn credit towards early reserve retirement.

"In addition, there are a few issues which we did not include in this year's NDAA due to mandatory spending issues and the need to tighten our belts during these economic times, but ultimately still deserve our attention.

"First is President Obama's proposal that would have allowed military personnel retired with disabilities, the so-called Chapter 61 retirees, to receive both their full military disability retired pay and VA disability pay. This issue of concurrent receipt has been addressed by this Committee, and while we have been making inroads, there are still many veterans who need our help. This offset discredits a veterans' service, and often places them in a financially strapped position, due to an inability to seek employment elsewhere.

"Additionally, it was not possible to eliminate the so-called Widow's Tax that results because surviving spouses are required to forfeit their Survivor Benefit Pension annuity. Current policy results in up to \$1,000 per month being off-set from a surviving spouses' pay. This is a substantial burden to widows of service members. Military members planned for their spouses and families to be taken care of in the event of their death, and we owe it to them to ensure that their wishes and expectation are fully met.

"Lastly, the issue of retroactive retirement credit for Guard and Reserve soldiers who served after 9/11 is very important to me. These soldiers have answered the call of duty, helping meet the challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as leading efforts in domestic rescue operations, such as Hurricane Katrina. The Guard and Reserve have transformed into an operational force since 9/11, and I believe the soldiers deserve no less for their honorable service than their active duty counterparts.

"I understand today's economic climate, and I know Congress must set an example of fiscal responsibility. However, here is what most of America sees: When House leadership deems an issue a priority, the rules can, and are, set aside. Thus, for example, Congress and the President have committed to spending trillions of dollars on a so-called 'stimulus' bill, 'Cash for Clunkers' and 'Caulkers', and a government healthcare takeover, without any seeming concern for mandatory spending offsets. 'Cash for Caulkers' was funded a billion \$6.6 billion and will likely run into the same administrative and funding issues 'Cash for Clunkers' did. And as we all remember, when 'Cash for Clunkers' ran out of funds, Congress re-appropriated billions almost immediately.

"Again, I realize we need to practice fiscal restraint, but we must also hold other issues to the same litmus test. Because at the end of the day we owe it to our brave men and women in uniform to ensure they know they are not forgotten. I will continue working to keep these issues at the forefront of our priorities."

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